

Message Text

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PAGE 01 BANGUI 01279 090103Z

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FM AMEMBASSY BANGUI

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INFO AMEMBASSY ABIDJAN

AMEMBASSY KINSHASA

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AMEMBASSY NDJAMENA

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY TEHRAN

AMEMBASSY YAOUNDE

C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGUI 1279

LIMDIS

TEHRAN FOR FAIRCHILD

E.O.11652: GDS

TAGS: PEPR, PINS, CT, US, EAID

SUBJ: AMBASSADOR'S RETROSPECTIVE: SUMMARY

1. AS I PREPARE TO LEAVE THE CENTRAL AFRICAN EMPIRE AFTER TWO AND A HALF YEARS, I HAVE TRIED TO SUM UP MY IMPRESSIONS OF THIS EXTRAORDINARY COUNTRY. IN THE THREE TELEGRAMS WHICH FOLLOW I EVALUATE BOKASSA, AS A MAN AND A RULER, DESCRIBE THE PARLOUS STATE OF THE CAE'S ECONOMY AND POLITICAL SYSTEM AND SUGGEST SOME IMPLICATIONS FOR CAE-US RELATIONS.

2. THE ESSENTIAL FACT ABOUT THE CAE IS BOKASSA. HE DOMINATES ALL ASPECTS OF NATIONAL LIFE; HE SETS THE COUNTRY'S PRIORITIES; HE TAKES ALL DECISIONS. HE IS A MAN DEEPLY MARKED BY HIS COLONIAL UPBRINGING AND BY HIS SENSE OF AFRICAN CHIEFTAINCY. TYRANNICAL
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PAGE 02 BANGUI 01279 090103Z

AND CAPRICIOUS, AND WITH LITTLE CONCERN FOR HUMAN RIGHTS, HE IS FAR FROM OUR IDEAL OF A MODERN AND PROGRESSIVE AFRICAN LEADER. NONETHELESS, HE HAS WHAT SEEMS TO BE A FIRM GRIP ON POWER AND HE REMAINS FUNDAMENTALLY LOYAL TO THE WEST. IN MY EXPERIENCE WE CAN WORK WITH AND AROUND HIM TO PROTECT OUR LIMITED INTERESTS. HE CAN ON OCCASION BE HELPFUL TO US AND WE NEED HIS PASSIVE SUPPORT FOR OUR DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY FOCUSED ON BASIC HUMAN NEEDS.

3. THE ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT IS NOT A PARTICULARLY HOPEFUL ONE. WHILE BANGUI APPEARS PROSPEROUS, PROVINCIAL CAE IS SLOWLY SINKING UNDER THE DETERIORATION OF BASIC INFRASTRUCTURE AND THE LACK OF GOVERNMENT RESOURCES. THIS DETERIORATION IS UNLIKELY TO BE REVERSED AS LONG AS BOKASSA IS IN POWER, THOUGH FOREIGN AID AND EXPATRIATE EFFORTS KEEP THE SYSTEM FROM TOTAL BREAKDOWN.

4. THE PROCLAMATION OF THE EMPIRE GAVE CENTRAL AFRICA A NEW POINT OF POLITICAL REFERENCE. THE RETURN TO CONSTITUTIONAL GOVERNMENT AND THE WITHDRAWAL OF THE EMPEROR FROM THE CENTER OF THE POLITICAL STAGE OFFERED HOPE FOR A MORE OPEN AND RESPONSIVE SYSTEM. THESE HOPES HAVE BEEN LARGELY LOST AS BOKASSA HAS MOVED INCREASINGLY TO REASSERT HIS AUTHORITY. NONETHELESS, NATIONAL PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS LATER THIS YEAR WILL PROVIDE A FIRST STEP TOWARDS A MORE INSTITUTIONALIZED REGIME.

5. AGAINST THE BACKGROUND OF THE EMPEROR'S ARBITRARINESS AND IMPULSIVENESS AND THE STAGNATION OF THE ECONOMY, IT IS NO EASY MATTER TO CARRY OUT OUR PROGRAMS. OUR RELATIONS ARE SUBJECT TO DRAMATIC UPS AND DOWNS AS BOKASSA TRIES TO MANIPULATE US FOR HIS OWN PURPOSES OR BEING CARRIED AWAY BY SOME TEMPORARY INCIDENT OVERREACTS IN WAYS DAMAGING TO OUR RELATIONS. NONETHELESS, HE USUALLY COMES BACK TO US WITH PROPOSALS FOR RENEWED FRIENDSHIP. DESPITE THESE DIFFICULTIES OUR AID AND PEACE CORPS
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PAGE 03 BANGUI 01279 090103Z

PROGRAMS, WHICH DIRECTLY BENEFIT THE RURAL POPULATION, DESERVE TO BE CARRIED ON. OUR TRAINING OF CENTRAL AFRICANS, IN-COUNTRY, IN AFRICA AND ABROAD NEEDS TO BE STEPPED UP. OUR LONG TERM GOAL MUST BE TO LOOK BEYOND BOKASSA AND THE EMPIRE. WE SHOULD BE BUILDING FOR THE FUTURE NOT ONLY IN OUR DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS BUT ALSO IN OUR RELATIONS WITH THE YOUNGER LEADERSHIP GENERATION. WE SHOULD NOT LET OURSELVES OFF FROM CENTRAL AFRICA, BUT WITH MODERATION AND STEADINESS OF PURPOSE, GO FORWARD FROM WHAT WE HAVE ALREADY ACHIEVED.
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